

§ 622.31

fish and wildlife agencies will be included if they are technically and economically feasible and are acceptable to the sponsors and the NRCS. If additional sponsors are needed to carry out the recommended fish and wildlife measures, NRCS will assist fish and wildlife agencies in attempting to obtain such sponsors.

(c) All planning efforts by NRCS and the sponsors must include well publicized public meetings to obtain public input and views on the project.

§ 622.31 Basic planning efforts.

Upon receipt of an application, the NRCS will make any necessary field studies and develop a report to justify the need for planning effort. Once planning is authorized by the Chief of NRCS, a watershed plan-environmental impact statement (plan-EIS) or a watershed plan-environmental assessment (plan-EA) will be prepared by NRCS to request funding. This effort must be coordinated with other State and Federal agencies.

§ 622.32 Reviews and approvals.

(a) The watershed plan-environmental impact statement (or assessment) will be subject to internal technical reviews, sponsor and other local party review, interagency review by other Federal, state, and concerned groups, and a final review as stated in NRCS's National Watersheds Manual.

(b) After thorough review by NRCS and other agencies, the NRCS and the sponsors shall accept the plan-EIS or plan-EA by signing the watershed agreement. The watershed plan must be approved by the Committees of Congress or the Chief of NRCS. Funding for installation can then be granted by the Chief of NRCS.

PART 623—EMERGENCY WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM

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§ 623.1 Purpose and scope.

(a) The regulations in this part set forth the policies, procedures, and requirements for the Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program (EWRP). Under the EWRP, NRCS will make offers to purchase wetland conservation easements from persons owning croplands that were damaged by the 1993 Midwest floods if those lands have the potential for restoration to wetland conditions and if the owner voluntarily agrees to restore and maintain those conditions. The easements are to be purchased to promote the restoration and maintenance of wetland characteristics, such as hydrologic conditions of inundation or saturation of the soil and hydrophytic vegetation. The functions and values of the wetlands for wildlife habitat, water quality improvement, flood water retention, floodway enhancement, ground water recharge, open space, aesthetic values, and environmental education will thus be promoted. The wetland conservation easements will permanently prohibit use of the affected land as cropland. Additionally, the easement shall require permanent maintenance of the wetland conditions, except in the case of natural disaster.

(b) The EWRP is available only in the following States: Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Certain cropland areas within these States have been determined to have been inundated by the Midwest floods of 1993. As more fully defined and described in

this part, eligible land may include farmed wetlands or prior converted wetlands (wetlands converted prior to December 23, 1985), together with adjacent lands on which the wetlands are functionally dependent so long as the likelihood of successful restoration of such land and the potential wetland values merit inclusion in the program with reasonable costs.

§ 623.2 Definitions.

The following definitions shall be applicable for the purposes of this part:

(a) *Agricultural commodity*—means any crop planted and produced by annual tilling of the soil, or on an annual basis by one trip planters, or alfalfa and other multiyear grasses and legumes in rotation as approved by the Secretary. For purposes of determining crop history, as relevant to eligibility to enroll land in the program, land shall be “considered planted to an agricultural commodity” during a crop year if, as determined by ASCS, as action of the Secretary prevented land from being planted to the commodity during the crop year.

(b) *Applicant*—means a person who submits to NRCS an application to participate in the EWRP.

(c) *Commodity Credit Corporation*—a wholly owned government corporation within the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

(d) *Conservation District (CD)*—means a subdivision of a State or local government organized pursuant to applicable State law to promote soil and water conservation practices.

(e) *Conservation Reserve Program*—means the program under which long-term payments and cost-share assistance is provided to individuals to establish permanent vegetative cover on cropland that is highly erodible or environmentally sensitive.

(f) *Prior converted wetland*—means wetland that has been drained, dredged, filled, leveled, or otherwise manipulated (including any activity that results in impairing or reducing the flow, circulation, or reach of water) prior to December 23, 1985, for the purpose, or that has the effect, of making the production of agricultural commodities possible if such production

would not have been possible but for such action.

(g) *Cost-share payment*—means the payment made by NRCS to assist program participants in establishing the practices required in a WRPO.

(h) *Chief*—means the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or the Chief's designee.

(i) *Easement*—means the real property interest acquired by NRCS under this part for wetland restoration and maintenance and which is properly filed with the appropriate local or State government official.

(j) *Easement area*—means the land to which the approved wetland restoration practices and wetland conservation restrictions are to be applied.

(k) *Fair market value (FMV)*—means the price that a willing seller would accept and a willing buyer would pay in an open, informed transaction.

(l) *Farmed wetland*—means wetland that was drained, dredged, filled, or otherwise manipulated prior to December 23, 1985 to the extent that the production of agricultural commodities was made possible, but which continues to meet wetland criteria [refer to 7 CFR 12.32(a)(3) for descriptions of farmed wetlands].

(m) *Floodwater control systems*—means dikes, levees, or other similar structural measures for the protection of cropland from flooding.

(n) *FWS*—means the Fish and Wildlife Service of the United States Department of the Interior.

(o) *Local NRCS office*—means the office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service serving the county or combination of counties in which the landowner's farm or ranch is located.

(p) *Participant*—means a person(s) owning land subject to a perfected easement purchased by the Natural Resources Conservation Service under this part.

(q) *Offer*—means the total payment NRCS will make to a landowner to purchase an easement.

(r) *Permanent easement*—means an easement in perpetuity.

(s) *Substantially altered lands*—means lands which have not been and are not now wetlands but could likely develop wetland characteristics in the future,